



OSWER Innovations Pilot

Innovative Multi-Media Environmental Curriculum Pilot

The Office of Solid Waste and Emergency Response (OSWER) Assistant Administrator Marianne Horinko in December 2001 initiated a series of innovative pilots to test new ideas and strategies for environmental and public health protection to make OSWER programs more efficient, effective, and user-friendly. A small amount of money is set aside to fund creative proposals submitted by OSWER Headquarters and Regional employees. EPA employees are encouraged to talk to States, Tribes, local governments and external stakeholders about proposal ideas and partner on a project. The creative projects test approaches to waste minimization, energy recovery, recycling, and land revitalization that may be replicated across various sectors, industries, communities, and regions. We hope these pilots will pave the way for programmatic and policy recommendations by demonstrating the environmental and economic benefits of creative, innovative approaches to the difficult environmental challenges we face today.

BACKGROUND

The South East section of Oklahoma City comprises 50 square miles of the once flourishing industrial core of the city. Redevelopment in this northeast sector is impeded by its historic industrial uses. The city has compiled a list of 990 sites in the area with perceived environmental problems and redevelopment potential. The list of environmentally challenged sites would be even greater if a more systematic review of other sources of data was conducted. In addition to the many brownfields in Oldtown, there are four remediated and unused Superfund sites in the area. Oklahoma City has actively sought to redevelop this area through construction projects and creation of financial incentives to redevelopment. Despite the city's efforts, suspicion of environmental damage is so pervasive that it has dissuaded potential developers and industrial users to even investigate the reuse of properties in this area.

U.S. EPA Region 6 and Oklahoma City believe that something more than the traditional site-by-site assessment approach is needed to spur revitalization in this sector. The city believes that a comprehensive environmental strategy for the area is necessary, including a thorough inventory of all environmental challenges in the area, a cleanup strategy, and a comprehensive groundwater strategy.

PILOT APPROACH

The University of Oklahoma, Norman, in partnership with U.S. EPA Region 6, Oklahoma City, the Oklahoma Department of Environmental Quality (ODEQ), and the Oklahoma Corporation Commission, will establish a curriculum at the University of Oklahoma, Norman, including the use of innovative technologies, to comprehensively identify, assess, and remediate multiple brownfields sites instead of through a typical site by site approach. This new approach will be developed through the schools of Architecture and Planning, Engineering and Environmental Sciences, Business, and Law.

INNOVATION

The pilot provides the structure for integrating the regulatory responsibilities of the State Voluntary Cleanup Program, the State RCRA Program, the State Storage Tank Program, the Superfund Program, and the Water and Air programs to address the specialized needs of this section of Oklahoma City. By coming together in a multi-media approach to oversee the creation of this curriculum, all of these programs are committed to coordinating data and requirements. The process of creating the University curriculum project creates partnerships that have not yet been formalized to deal with the complex environmental problems of northeast

Oklahoma City. The design and implementation of the curriculum will create a model for similar coalitions of governmental, academic, community, and private sector representatives to join in the resolution of environmental problems plaguing old industrial areas everywhere.

BENEFITS

Once the curriculum is complete, the city, together with ODEQ, will leverage funding available to it under the newly legislated state brownfields program and EPA to develop the comprehensive environmental strategy for this blighted northeast sector of town. It will set the stage for strategically addressing environmental contamination and completing assessments and cleanup. Redeveloping an urban area with existing infrastructure reduces stress to air and water resources caused by continued greenspace development. Sprawl is a growing trend in Oklahoma City and the impacts on air quality, land, and water resources are at a point where infill development is environmentally preferable. In addition, redevelopment in Oldtown will bring jobs, homes, recreational facilities, and economic growth to a forgotten area.

CONTACTS

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For additional information, visit the EPA OSWER Innovations web site at: www.epa.gov/oswer/IWG.htm